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OROHOO, THE FAIRY MAN,

A REMINISCENCE OF CONNAUGHT.

WERE we to believe the chronicles of our grandmothers, Ireland at one period was held in fee-simple by witches, warlocks, white ladies, fairies, and leprahauns; the earth, the air, and the sky, were peopled by them; every crumbling and desolate cabin on the sterile moor or common was tenanted by a witch; while the margins of our beautiful loughs, the bosoms of our silent and sequestered glens, the recesses of our romantic mountain valleys, the echoing walls of every mouldering edifice, and the mystic circle of each rude hill-forth, were the chosen habitations of unearthly beings.

Nor was this belief held by the uneducated alone; many who moved in respectable situations in society were infected by it; and otherwise sensible and well-informed people on this head were deaf to the voice of reason and the dictates of common sense, and would as soon doubt the truth of Holy Writ as the existence of supernatural agency; and so interwoven was the superstition in the social system, that no event could happen poor mortality from the cradle to the grave, in which the good people were not implicated for good or evil. Did the head or a member of a leading family die, the wail of the banshee was sure to be heard in the twilight. Was a favourite child smitten with disease, the beautiful, the beloved one was believed to be changed for a squalling, ravenous, and decrepid starveling. Did your cattle pine, or was your dairy not productive, your cows were either elf-shot or bewitched. Was the wife of your bosom snatched away in her bloom, in the most interesting though dangerous moment of her existence, the fairies were whispered to be the authors of your misfortune—to have spirited her off, and to have left in her stead a wooden substitute.

Well do I remember the thrill of fear, mingled with a degree of pleasurable awe, with which I listened some forty years since to the narratives of a venerable aunt, who was lingering out the evening of her existence at my father's fireside—her only occupation being, rocking the cradle and keeping the youngsters from mottling their shins. She was an experienced dame, and withal pious, but would as soon doubt her own identity as that of witches and fairies, and her memory was well stored with instances of their interference. These I then believed most implicitly, particularly as in many of them "the family" was concerned. She could relate how her grandfather one morning detected a hare in the act of milking one of his cows, which he fired at and wounded, and on tracking the blood, discovered it to flow from the thigh of an old crone who inhabited a neighbouring hovel. She also could tell how an elder brother had surprised a leprahaun in the act of making shoes for the gentle people—could describe his dress minutely, and how he had escaped captivity by making a feint with his awl at my uncle's eye, and causing him to wink when in the very act of seizing him, and thereby marred his fortune. She also knew a child which was taken from its mother's arms at night, but luckily was missed before he could be conveyed through the key-hole, and on the outcry of the bereaved parent, was dropped "with a whack" on the floor uninjured. It never occurred to her that probably the child had rolled out of the bed accidentally. There was another tale often related by her, which it would be worse than heresy to doubt, as she knew the parties intimately.

An honest man named John M'Kinstrey, who resided near Maheraveely, in the county Monaghan, was once compelled to leave his warm bed in "the witching time of night," on a certain pressing occasion, and ride post-haste for a worthy dame whose assistance was indispensable. While returning with the "howdy" safely stowed on an ample pillion behind, he heard the strokes of an axe reverberating through a neighbouring wood, and voices in conversation. Curiosity prompted him to draw up and listen, when he distinctly heard the question asked, "What are you doing to-night?" and to his dis-

may the answer was responded, "I'm making a wife for Jack M'Kinstrey." "Faith," said Jack, "you'll make no wife for me, my man—I'll do very well with the one I have;" and giving his good beast the spur, regardless of the neck, bones, or outcry of his freight, he never drew rein until he had his better half clasped in his arms, where he held her in a death's-grip until the crisis was over, and thus balked the fairies.

Thus was the whole system of society pervaded by the idea of supernatural influence; and the consequence was an undefinable dread and fear, hanging like the sword of Damocles over the heads of all, and embittering existence. 'Tis true the evil was only imaginary, but not on that account the less hurtful; for, being a mental malady, it was the more difficult to be counteracted or eradicated, and often led to real anxiety and distress, as in the case of M'Kinstrey, whose ideas being full of witchcraft and fairy freaks, never reflected that the noise and voices he had heard might be a practical joke of some of his neighbours, and in consequence suffered all the suspense and trouble incident to real danger.

But the diffusion of useful knowledge and the dissemination of sound education among all classes, has latterly effected a mighty change in the intellectual powers of the people. Such reveries as those referred to, though sometimes used to "adorn a tale," are now unheeded; and there are few indeed who would harbour for a moment in sincerity the absurd idea of evil agency. There may be, 'tis true, some exceptions—a few old women may be still haunted by the sprites of other days, and in some remote districts a belief in witchcraft certainly prevails, ingrafted by early prejudices, and fostered and kept alive by the practices of knaves, who profess to avert the effects by counter-charms, and live, like many others, on the credulity of the public; but, generally speaking, the thing is defunct—gone to the moles and the bats.

But there is an exception. In several districts in Ireland, in Connaught especially, an idea is very prevalent that it is in the power of evil-disposed persons to deprive their neighbours of their milk or butter. This is said to be done in various ways, the most usual being the use of a corpse hand, which is kept shrivelled and dried to stir the milk and gather the butter. Another plan is to follow the cows on a May morning, and gather the soil which drops from between their cloots. Another, by collecting the froth which forms on a stream running through their pasture, and milking your own cow on it. Indeed, the means used are represented to be so simple, that the very absurdity of the matter is its own refutation.

Yet it is believed in, and that firmly; and in order to prove that such is the case, and also expose the trickery andlegerdmain by which some knaves succeed in throwing dust in the eyes of the natives, I will relate an occurrence in which I was concerned; and to open the matter fully in all its ramifications, windings, and train of circumstances, I trust I will be pardoned if I enter into a rather minute detail, the rather as I confess I was for a short time myself almost inclined to credit its existence—in short, believed myself the dupe of a fairy man.

Some time since I resided in the neighbourhood of the "plains of Boyle," a celebrated pasture country, and was the possessor of a cow whose milk and butter were plentiful in quantity and excellent in quality, and materially contributed to the comforts of my family. She was a beautiful and a gentle creature; and I flattered myself that in her I possessed the fountness of a numerous herd, and the germ of a profitable and extensive dairy.

As before observed, the idea was very prevalent there that it was in the power of evil-disposed persons to deprive you of your milk and butter, and I heard many complaints of the kind; the general voice fastened the imputation on a woman who lived in the vicinity, who was locally termed "the Hawk," and certainly the fire of her eye and the sharpness of her beak justified the appellation: she was a comely middle-aged person, in rather easy circumstances, her husband being a small farmer; but he lay under the suspicion of being concerned in a murder some time before. She was a reputed witch, and the entire family were disliked and avoided.

One morning in the month of January, I was informed that a woman had come into my kitchen, who occupied herself in watching the motions of the family, without stating her business. On going down, I found her well dressed and well looking, but with a very sinister cast of countenance. On asking if she wanted me, she said she had heard I was in want of some geese, and that she had a few to dispose of. "How

many?" said I. "A goose and a gander," she replied. "How much do you want for them?" "Seven-and-sixpence." "Seven-and-sixpence!" I exclaimed in surprise, as the usual price then was from one shilling to one-and-sixpence each. "Why, how many have you?" as I really thought I had made a mistake in the number. "A goose and a gander," said she. "And do you suppose me to be a goose to give such a price as that?" said I. "Oh!" said she, "they are good geese, and only I wish to serve you, I would not offer them at all." "Indeed! I am much obliged by your good wishes," said I; "but as I think you want to impose upon me, you must take your geese to another market, for I will not have them at any price, and the sooner you take yourself off the better." She got highly offended, muttered something about my being sorry for refusing them, and went away in high dudgeon; and after she was gone, I found it was "the Hawk" who had favoured me with the visit.

On the same morning, a gang of strollers, consisting of tinkers, chimney-sweeps, a brace or two of beggars, and a piper, had pitched their tent on the road side, a short distance from my residence; the members of the party had distributed themselves over the surrounding district in pursuit of their various avocations; it also happened to be churning-day, and my wife having set her vessels in order, was proceeding with her lacteal operations favourably—the milk had cracked, the butter was expected—when the sound of music was heard; the piper attached to the party had come to give us a specimen of his skill; he favoured us with a few Connaught planxtyes, was duly rewarded, and departed. Shortly after he was gone, two buxom baggages, brown and bare-legged, with cans in their hands, kerchiefs on their heads, and huge massive rings on their fingers, came and demanded an alms. They were told there was nothing then ready, on which one of them asked a drink. "I have nothing to offer you but water," said my wife, "until the churning's done." "Well, water itself," said she; on getting which, she took a sup or two, put the remainder in her can, and went off; and, strange as it may seem, my butter went too. And from that day in January until May eve following, not a morsel had we from our beautiful Brownie.

As I did not put any faith in witchcraft, I was willing to attribute this to some natural cause affecting the cow, though the milk showed no perceptible change in either quantity or quality; neither did she exhibit any symptoms of ailment or disorder, except that she began to cast her hair. She was well supplied with good fodder, comfortably lodged, and well attended, and every possible care taken of the milk, but all to no purpose; the butter was not forthcoming; and for my incredulity I was laughed at by my neighbours. "Your cow is bewitched," cried they; "and you may as well throw chaff against the wind, as think you will get your butter back, till you get the charm." Some said "the Hawk" had it, some that the gipsy took it away in her can, and others that it followed the piper. Be that as it may, I had to eat my bread butterless, and brood over my loss, without even the comfort of common condolence.

Various were the counter-charms recommended for my adoption. "Send for Fraser the Scotchman from beyond the Lough," said one; "he fears neither man nor fiend, and he will surely get it." "Send for 'the Hawk,' and clip a bit off her ear," said another. "Let them keep their mouths full of water, and never speak while they are churning," said a third. In short, I found there were as many ways of getting it back, as there were of losing it—all equally simple, and probably as efficacious.

Thus matters continued until the early part of the month of April, when one morning a man called, who desired to see me. I found him a light, active, 'cute-looking fellow, low in stature and spare in habit, but sinewy, well set and well knit, and regularly smoke-dried. He was pretty well clad in frieze, cord breeches, and yarn stockings and pumps; his caubeen on one side, a cutty in his mouth, and a certain jauntiness in his air, and crafty audacity in his look, which seemed to say, "I'd have you to know I'm a clever fellow."

"So," said he at once without preamble, "so you've lost your butter."

"Yes," said I, "'tis certainly gone."

"Well, if you like, I'll get it for you. My name is OROHO (O'Hara); I live at Sliev Bawn—the people call me the Fairy man—I can find things that's stole—and I keep the garvally."

"Indeed!" said I: "why, you must be a clever fellow: but can you get my butter?"

"Not a doubt of it," said he, "if it is in the country."

I had heard of the garvally before, which was described as "a crooked thing like the handle of an umbrella, covered with green baize." It was formerly in much repute for swearing on; "and a terrible thing it was, for if you swore falsely and it round your neck, your mouth would turn to the back of your head, or you'd get such a throttling as you'd never get the better of." It had latterly, however, lost much of its virtue, or rather of its fame, by an unbelieving vagabond yoking it on and swearing to a manifest falsehood, without suffering any visible inconvenience. But to return to Orohoo.

He made no stipulation; but requiring a deep plate, some water and salt, with a little of the cow's milk, he commenced by desiring my wife and me to stand forward. He then asked our names, if I was the owner of the cow, how long I had had her, if that woman was my wife, when we had lost our butter, and if we suspected any person for taking it. To these queries I answered as was necessary; but to the last I replied, I did not believe in witchcraft.

"Don't you believe in fairies?" he asked.

"Scarcely," said I.

"No matter," said he; "maybe before I'm done you will believe in them."

He then in a very solemn manner poured some water into the plate at three several times, thus—"In the name of the Father," a drop; "in the name of the Son," ditto; "in the name of the Holy Ghost," ditto. He added the milk in the same manner, and then sprinkled in the salt, using the same formula. He now stirred round the mixture three times with his finger, repeating the words as before, and desired us to do the same. To this I demurred, for I did not wish to evince any faith in the proceeding, by taking an active part; but he combated my scruples by asking "was it not done in a good name?" Certainly for so far I saw nothing very objectionable, and my wife feeling no scruple on the subject, at their joint persuasion I did as directed.

He next made the sign of the cross over the plate with his hands, and, waving them over his head, cut several curious figures in the air, at the same time muttering an unintelligible jargon I could not understand, but which, as I could catch a sound or syllable, bore a close affinity to what is called bog Latin. Gradually he became much excited; he raved like a demon, stamped with his feet, and threatened with his fists: now his tones were those of supplication or entreaty, anon of abjuration or command; while his eye seemed fixed upon and to follow the motions of some to us invisible being, with which he appeared to hold converse. Suddenly he gave an unearthly scream, as if in an agony of terror and perturbation, and, holding up his hands as in the act of warding off a threatened danger, he retreated backwards round the room, pursued, as it seemed, by an implacable enemy. Gradually he regained the spot he had left, turned himself to the four cardinal points, making the sign of the cross at each turn, dipped his fingers in the mixture, devoutly blessed himself, anointing his forehead, shoulders, and breast, regained his self-possession, raised his hands and eyes in an attitude of fervent thankfulness to heaven, wiped the perspiration which profusely streamed from his brow with the cuff of his coat, gradually recovered his breath, and from a state of the greatest possible excitement became calm and collected.

Now, this was all acting, to be sure, but it was inimitably done, and I confess, even armed as I was with unbelief, it made a very powerful impression on me. I acknowledge I did not feel at all comfortable. I did not like the idea of being in the same room with the evil one, who to all appearance was chasing my friend the conjuror round and round it. I felt an indescribable sensation of dread creeping over me, and, if I mistake not, there were a few drops of perspiration on my brow; and my hair, of which I have not a superabundance, to my apprehension began to get stiff and wiry. My wife, too, clung closely to my side for protection, and the agitation of her mind was evident by the audible action of her heart, which in that case beat only responsive to my own.

Having taken breath, he asked for a ribbon, which he passed over his forehead and round his head, and, bringing the ends in front, knotted it over his nose; then twining it round his fingers in the manner children call a cat's cradle, he knelt down and peered through it attentively into the mixture, which I imagined at the moment fermented and sent up a blue vapour. After gazing a few seconds in this manner,

"Aha!" said he, "she is not far off that has your butter; bring me a lighted candle," which on being brought he placed in the plate. "Now," said he, "both of you kneel down; do

as I do, and say as I say, and we'll have her here directly."

"No," said I decidedly, "we will not."

I thought we had gone far enough, and was convinced that if what we were engaged in was not an unholy act, it was at least a piece of gross deception, and I would not countenance it by any further participation.

"Why," exclaimed he, "don't you want to get your butter?"

"Yes," said I, "I would like to have my butter, but I don't choose to resort to a charm to obtain it."

"No doubt this is a charm," said he, "but it is done in a good name; and I have done it before for as good as ever you were."

"So much the worse," I replied; "that holy name should never be profaned in such a manner, and I am sorry any person would be so wicked or so foolish as to encourage you in your tricks. I neither like you nor your proceedings, and the sooner you go about your business the better."

He started to his feet in a passion, blew out the candle, seized the plate, and attempted to throw the contents into the fireplace; but my wife, who did not wish her hearth to be wet, took it from him and laid it past. He fumed and stormed, said I let him take a great deal of trouble on my account, and insisted on proceeding; but I was determined, and, being considerably chafed and annoyed by the transaction, I again ordered him off, and left him.

In a few moments I heard the noise of a violent altercation and scuffle, and I was loudly called on. I hastened to the scene of contention, and found my wife holding Orohoo by the neck, and preventing his departure. "What's all this?" I exclaimed. "This fellow," said she, "when he was going, took a live coal out of the grate, and told me to take care of my children." This he stiffly denied, until confronted by the servant, and I threatened to give him up to the police as an impostor, when he quailed, and acknowledged that he had said so, but that he meant no harm by it. "And sure," said he, "there's no harm in bidding you mind them; for if your cow was hurt, so may your children. You're not treating me well," he continued; "I came at the bidding of a friend to do you a good turn, and asked nothing for it, and now you're putting me out; you'll be glad to see me yet, though. But take my advice: never throw out your Sunday's ashes until Tuesday morning, and always sweep your floor in from the door to the hearth." And away he went.

My heart now beat easy, for I thought we had fairly got rid of the fairy man; but I was to be still further mystified and bewildered. On examining the plate over which he had performed his incantations, we found the contents to be thick, yellow, and slimy, with a red sediment like globules of blood at the bottom. This seemed extraordinary, as I certainly watched him closely, and did not see him put any thing into the plate but milk, water, and salt.

The month now drew near a close, and our bread was still butterless. This often caused the morsel to stick in the throat of my poor dear partner, who felt none of the scruples of conscience with which I was affected, and firmly believed her cow was bewitched. "Here we are day after day losing our substance, and might have it only for your squeamishness in not letting the fairy man finish his job." Thus she would argue, and hesitated not to call me a fool, nay, a downright ass; and indeed my neighbours were much of the same opinion: one of them, a respectable farmer's wife, was particularly pertinacious. "My Robin," said she one evening, as they were harping on the old string, "my Robin was down in Sligo, and he heard that if you got the coulter of a plough, and made it red-hot in the fire, while you were churning the butter would come back; or if you chose to churn on Sunday morning before the lark sings, you will surely get it." "Tempt me no more with your spells or Sabbath-breaking; I will have none of them," said I, impatiently; "I will never barter my peace of mind for a pound of butter, if I should never eat a morsel."

But, in truth, my peace of mind was gone, for the continual urging and yammering I was subjected to made me heartily sick, and I inwardly resolved to sell the cow the first opportunity, and so end the matter.

On May eve, in the afternoon, I had occasion to leave home for a short time, and on my return was rather surprised to find all the windows closed and the door locked against me. I knocked and called for admittance, but received no answer; and hearing the noise of churning going on within, "fast and furious," the truth flashed across my mind; and lamenting my wife's credulity, I retired to the garden to await the result.

In a short time she came running out like one demented, clapping her hands and screaming, "Oh! we've got the butter, we've got the butter!" and on going in I found a coulter phizzing and sparking at a white heat in the fire, an ass's shoe (which had been found a few days previously) under the churn, my worthy neighbour aforesaid standing over it, panting and blowing from the exertions she had made on my behalf, and wiping the dew-drops from her really comely countenance, and in the churn, floating like lumps of gold in a sea of silver, as fine a churning of butter as ever we were blessed with.

Well, I own I was staggered, and being triumphantly asked, "Now, is there no witchcraft or virtue in a red-hot coulter?" I could scarcely muster up courage to utter "No." In vain I protested the butter came back because "Brownie" got back to her pasture, in consequence of the change in her feeding, from dry fodder to the mellow and genial produce of spring, as the loss at first was owing to the transition from grass to hay. 'Twas to no purpose to argue thus: all else were positive it was otherwise; but whether the virtue was in Orohoo's incantations, the efficacy of the red-hot coulter, the influence of the ass's shoe, or the tremendous compelling the milk was subjected to on the occasion, no one could exactly say.

A few days after, I conversed on the subject with an intelligent person, a herd in charge of an extensive stock farm. After hearing my story to an end, he indulged in a hearty laugh at my expense. "Faith," said he, "I took you for a sensible man, and did not suppose you would credit such folly." "I'd as soon believe my mother was a bishop," said I, "as put any faith in it some time ago. But how can I get over the chain of circumstantial evidence?—not a link of it wanting. First, 'the Hawk' coming with her seven-and-sixpenny geese, then the gipsies and the piper, and losing my butter just then." "Tis very easy," said he, "to account for it. In the first place, you took your cow from grass and fed her on hay." "Yes, but she had plenty of winter cabbage, and we gave her boiled potatoes." "Just the thing; cabbage is good for plenty of milk, but not for butter. I'll engage you gave her the potatoes warm." "Yes." "And she got a scour?" "Indeed she did, and her hair fell off." "So I thought. And afterwards she got in good condition?" "Yes." "Oh! ay, she put her butter on her ribs. Did you kill a pig at Christmas?" "I did." "Where did you put your bacon in press?" "Why, under the shelf in the dairy." "Now the murder is out! Never as long as you live put meat, either fresh or salt, near your milk-vessels; if you do, you will surely spoil your milk and lose your butter." "This may account for my loss, but what have you to say to its coming back?" "Why, what's to hinder it, when your bacon is in the chimney and your cow at grass?" "But the red blobs in the plate, and Orohoo fighting the devil for me, what do you say to that?" Here he gave way to such a violent fit of laughter that I really thought he would burst the waistband of his doe-skins. "Orohoo! ha! ha!—Orohoo! ha! ha! ha!—the greatest villain that ever breathed. He came to me one time that I had a cow sick, and said she was fairy-smitten, and that he would cure her. He began with his tricks with the milk and water, just the same as he did with you; but I watched him closer; and when I saw the smoke rising out of the plate, I got him by the neck, shook a little bottle of vitriol out of the cuff of his coat, and took a paper of red earthy powder out of his waistcoat pocket." I looked aghast and confounded. Was I, then, the dupe of the fairy man? The thought was humiliating, and I even wished that I had remained in ignorance, but on reflection had reason to congratulate myself that it was only a temporary lapse, and that I was right in my original opinion, that, except the witchery of a pair of blue languishers, or the fairy spell of a silver-tongued syren, there is now no evil of the kind to be apprehended.

A.

FASHION IS A POOR VOCATION.—Its creed, that idleness is a privilege, and work a disgrace, is among the deadliest errors. Without depth of thought, or earnestness of feeling, or strength of purpose, living an unreal life, sacrificing substance to show, substituting the fictitious for the natural, mistaking a crowd for society, finding its chief pleasure in ridicule, and exhausting its ingenuity in expedients for killing time, fashion is among the last influences under which a human being who respects himself, or who comprehends the great end of life, would desire to be placed.